

Sheffield Teaching Hospitals NHS Foundation Trust (STHFT) - treatment radiotherapy reviews at treatment hub hospital

Background

Sheffield SLT reviewed all Sheffield GP patient during radiotherapy treatment but noted that non-Sheffield patients were missing out on face-to-face review during treatment and would find it difficult to attend appointments at their local SLT hospitals on the same day as receiving radiotherapy treatment at Sheffield Teaching Hospitals.

This was particularly problematic for patients needing a face-to-face review for dysphagia assessment e.g. swallowing has deteriorated during RT treatment, with suspected aspiration. On occasion, this situation had resulted in hospital admission to access a SLT swallow assessment.

Approach

- A business case was put forward, supported by our Cancer Site Lead and consultant oncologist, for funding to provide on-treatment planned SLT reviews for all head and neck patients during radiotherapy, with capacity to deliver urgent face-to-face SLT assessments for all head and neck radiotherapy outpatients during treatment.
- Planned reviews were scheduled for week 6, to allow time for another review prior to the end of treatment if required. SLT outcome measures were collected as part of standard review protocol eg. 100ml WST, trismus measures, IDDSI levels, PSS-normalcy of diet, FOIS.
- The service commenced in November 2022, providing a 3 days a week service.
- A service evaluation was completed with 50 patients to evaluate the benefit of the out of area SLT radiotherapy outpatient service for all head and neck cancer patients. This included IDDSI levels at the start of the SLT week 6 review, and post-SLT assessment as well as qualitative patient questionnaires. Head and Neck SLTs from the spoke hospitals whose patients were now receiving on treatment face-to-face reviews also completed qualitative questionnaires.

Challenges

- Return of patient questionnaires: 26% returned (maybe due to anonymous

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- return process and being at end of RT treatment), 75% of SLT questionnaires returned.
- Need for flexibility of SLT service to see patients close to the time of their radiotherapy appointments
- Difficulties with access to SLT electronic notes between trusts and additional time for handover

Outcome/Impact

- Responses to both patient and SLT questionnaires showed an overall positive impact of the new service for out of area patients, including access to face-to-face reviews, completion of outcome measures, swallowing assessments and advice/ support regarding symptom management and maintaining eating and drinking.
- Timely access to swallow assessment can prevent hospital admission to access a dysphagia assessment and help support a patient to maintain their nutrition and hydration during radiotherapy treatment. Outcomes of the face-to-face assessment can include facilitating review by other members of the MDT e.g. for pain management.
- Maintaining safe oral intake of textured diet, maximising symptom management and facilitating swallowing exercises during radiotherapy treatment can support a patient to keep swallowing with the aim of improving swallowing outcomes post-treatment e.g. preventing stenosis.

“I think re-assuring patients about exercises/ eating regime is very important.

Thank you for your support/ help doing treatment” – patient seen by new service

“Better than having to go to a different hospital if needing help”

– patient seen by new service

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“The week 6 point is critical as often patients are starting to suffer the worst of the side effects of their treatment, so details of their assessment help prioritise their follow up so timely support is offered on completion of treatment. Some patients whose cancer diagnosis did not suggest significant side effects, but who had a particularly bad reaction have been flagged up to us by this review” – spoke hospital SLT feedback on patients being able to access on-treatment review

Top Tips

- Setting up a clear pathway for referrals and transfer of information between services is important for hub and spoke models where different electronic notes systems may be in use.
- Identify outcome measures, including PROMS to evaluate the service